



Environmental Management and Indian Agriculture

V Basil Hans*

Department of Economics, St Aloysius Group of Institutions, India

***Corresponding Author:** V Basil Hans, Department of Economics, St Aloysius Group of Institutions, India.

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There is an increasing concern in India today about ecological imbalance and the adverse effects on agriculture. With the new mandate of sustainable development, we have more significant challenges. Environmental management should be applied to Indian agriculture in the context of technological changes and economic reforms. It underpins people's participation as pivotal alongside the role and functions of governments and corporate bodies for ensuring equity and sustainability in every effort at raising agricultural productivity and output. In India the natural resources are not always put to optimum use – there is a wide gap between precept and practice. Part of this lack of direction is due to the multidisciplinary nature of environmental management for which the individual and institutions had not been equipped with. In the meanwhile, deforestation, soil erosion, land degradation, desertification and other disturbances go on. The environment daily becomes less and less habitable. To top it all, there is a population explosion both humans and livestock. Suitable action for sustainable development is the need of the hour. Productivity and performance of Indian agriculture are also closely linked to ecological balance and benefits therefrom.

The crucial role of people and policies in safeguarding the global environment needs to be widely understood in the context of economic development in general and agricultural growth in particular. Affirmative action has to be adequately taken both in the short-run and in the long-run so that agricultural growth and environmental management go hand in hand and sustainable development is attained and maintained. The post-independence scenario of Indian agriculture reveals that the goal of feeding hungry millions has been almost accomplished through agricultural growth, but growth has become more of a single-tracked production-oriented approach side-tracking the questions of equity and sustainability.

India has the wettest spot in the world; it is a museum of crops; and it is rich in biodiversity. However, resources are fast depleting. There is a high degree of climate change and variations.

Loss of biodiversity is alarming in scale. Agricultural productivity is dwindling especially food crops. The issue of ecological balance on the one hand and that of sustainable agriculture on the other are significant concerns today. For India with more than one-fourth of the rural population below the poverty line, intergenerational equity is of great concern to policy-makers. It is the poor farmers who are the primary victims of environmental damage. As a result of environmental problems, one wonders how it would be possible to sustain even the present levels of crop yields, food and fodder production, and water purity, health and sanitation needs etc.

Efforts should be geared towards increasing the decentralisation of rural decision-making, with due emphasis on local participation and local decisions (e.g. tribal consciousness). Environmental and developmental decision-making processes should be integrated for better environmental planning and management. In the integrated development and management of three environments - Natural, Built and Socio-economic the bottom-line has to be "optimisation in managing available resources". Every threat coming with faster globalisation and development is a challenge for which both agriculturists and environmentalists should be better equipped. Frightened concern for environmental and agricultural safety should be replaced by a heightened confident concern. A breeze of environmental awareness and action for sound management is sweeping today. That is a sign of good hope.

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